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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002423

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAI POLITICAL UPDATE: CABINET ADDITIONS,
DEMONSTRATION, CONSTITUTION

REF: A. BANGKOK 2364 (BUDDHIST PROTEST WILTS)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2280 (AMBASSADOR'S LUNCH WITH WINAI)

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton, reason: 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont has appointed three new Deputy Ministers to his cabinet, but this move seems unlikely to end public criticism of his administration's relative ineffectiveness. An April 27 rally by some Thai Rak Thai members had a pro-Thaksin theme and drew approximately 10,000 people; the organizers intend to hold such rallies regularly. The general tone of public feedback on the draft constitution has been negative, with many critics calling for provisions enabling the election of Senators, even though the Thai Senate has traditionally been an appointed body. End Summary.

ADDITIONS TO THE CABINET

[1](#)2. (C) On April 28, a government spokesman announced the appointment of three officials taking up new cabinet positions:

-- Vallop Thaineua, as Deputy Public Health Minister: Vallop, a physician, was dismissed as permanent secretary of the Health Ministry in 2004, in a row with the Thai Rak Thai-member Health Minister. She claimed that Vallop was impeding the implementation of the 30-baht health scheme; Vallop claimed that he had refused to go along on a corrupt procurement deal. We hear that he may have been chosen to try to restrain the excesses of the Health Minister, whose lack of consultation before making controversial decisions over compulsory licensing has caused headaches for the government.

-- Nat Indarapan as Deputy Tourism and Sports Minister: Nat Indarapan is a former governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand.

-- Theerawut Butrsriphum as Deputy Interior Minister: Theerawut served as commander of Police Region Nine -- which has jurisdiction for all of southern Thailand -- from 1998-2000. His appointment is seen as an attempt to improve coordination between police and civilian officials operating in the far south. Theerawut's appointment could be a positive -- better coordination is desperately needed to address the crippling stovepiping among the agencies

operating in the South.

(Comment: Putting in more retirees from government service into deputy minister slots probably will not do much to enhance the cabinet's performance significantly, or to fend off the criticism of the interim administration. Ref B reported an insider predicting a meaningful cabinet reshuffle could take place in approximately one month, if the status quo continues. End Comment.)

THAKSIN ALLIES HOLD DEMONSTRATION

13. (C) Members of deposed Prime Minister Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party, who have taken a leading role in seeking to establish a new television station (called "People's Television," or "PTV"), organized a demonstration at the Royal Grounds in Bangkok on Friday, April 27. Although cut short by heavy rain, the rally drew approximately 10,000 supporters, who listened to PTV leaders defend Thaksin, decry the draft constitution and condemn the current government as a dictatorship. While some local newspapers apparently downplayed the number of attendees--in some cases by a factor of 10--the gathering was significantly larger than PTV's previous protests, if still a far cry from the hundreds of thousands who protested against Thaksin in 2006. The crowd, which appeared to be dominated by members of Bangkok's working class, was notably subdued, but attended by a full range of food and anti-CNS accessory vendors. A small contingent of bored Metropolitan and uniformed Special Branch police officers ringed the event. PTV leaders have publicly pledged to continue their weekend rallies, in the hopes of slowly building a groundswell of support for their cause.

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VIEWS ON THE CONSTITUTION EMERGING

14. (C) The Constitution Drafting Committee's draft charter has prompted numerous complaints while generating little if any enthusiasm. The top officials of both TRT and the Democrat Party criticized various aspects of the draft, while two dozen civic groups participating in a National Human Rights Commission forum called for the Constitution Drafting Assembly to make significant revisions. Criticism has tended to focus on the provisions enhancing the role of the judiciary and calling for the creation of a committee to appoint members of the Senate. (Note: The 1997 Constitution was the first to establish an elected Senate; previously, Senators were appointed. End Note.) This criticism comes in addition to demands from Buddhist organizations to include a designation of Buddhism as Thailand's state religion (ref A).

(Comment: Post will monitor popular views and the authorities' efforts to receive public feedback on the draft.

So far, we are hearing from a vocal but select group of political activists, taking up their negotiating positions as they try to influence the changes to the draft. But the negative press coverage will not help the authorities as they try to build support for the draft charter nation-wide before the referendum. End Comment.)

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